

# **School Evaluation Report**

**Rise Up Academy at Eggleston**

**19010 Adams Road,  
South Bend  
Indiana  
46637**

**Principal: George Azar**

**Dates of evaluation: May 10 – 11, 2011**

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### **Part 1: The School Context**

Background information about the school

### **Part 2: Overview**

The improvements that the school has made

The improvements that are still required

### **Part 3: Main findings**

**The impact of the money invested in the first year of the SIG program on the quality of education provided and the achievement of the students.**

**The current effectiveness of schools in the four key domains:**

- 1. Leadership**
- 2. Instruction**
- 3. Data**
- 4. Student support**

### **Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary**

## Part 1: The School Context

### Information about the school:

Rise Up Academy is an alternative high school serving students who are over aged, under credited and have not been successful in traditional placements. The school has an enrolment of 156 students, covering grade 10 through grade 12. The school population comprises 9 percent Hispanic, 61.5 percent African American, 27 percent White and 2.5 percent Native American students. Less than 1 percent of students are designated as English language learners. Eighteen percent of the students are identified as special education students. All students who attend the school are deemed to be 100 percent at risk. The attendance rate to date in 2010–2011 is 92 percent.

Rise Up Academy was previously called Bendix High School. When the School Improvement Grant (SIG) was developed it was written for Bendix High School. However during the summer recess, the school was re-sited and renamed. Bendix had been without a principal for ten years and the staff members were predominantly part-time teachers without permanent contracts. The current principal was appointed four weeks prior to school starting. He had no previous experience as an administrator, neither was he involved in the bid for the School Improvement Grant. The school staff were appointed prior to and during the first semester. Only five teachers from Bendix school retained their positions. The staff are enthusiastic but lack experience. Students at Bendix were also given the choice of transferring and several did. However, the school recruited a large number of new students. The short lead in time to the opening of the school was a significant barrier to its initial development. This resulted in a turbulent and poorly planned start to the academic year where the staff to student ratio was out of balance until new hirings were made.

The intervention model that was selected for the school was the 'Transformation' model. The turn around partner selected to support the school was the Association for High School Intervention (AHSI) who had been working with partners in Indiana since July 2007. AHSI agreed to implement a transformation model, specifically through 'assessing and selecting an appropriate model based on an analysis of student data'. The model they selected was Diploma Plus (DP) an organization who in August 2008 opened five new schools in Indiana as part of the Indianapolis – AHSI partnership. The transformation process focused on four major themes; leadership, instruction, use of data and student support.

## Part 2: Overview

### The areas of the school that have been improved:

- AHSI was chosen as the turnaround partner and operates with Diploma Plus who delivers the educational structure and operational philosophy within the school.
- A new school has been set up, named and is functioning effectively in limited areas.
- The school has a principal for the first time in ten years.
- Administration has been increased with the recent addition of an assistant principal.
- Fourteen of the seventeen staff are full-time and have permanent contracts.
- Staff have been empowered through the decision making structure developed by the school and therefore feel part of the development process.
- The principal is highly visible round the school, well liked, and respected by both staff and students.
- The principal has developed an extremely positive school culture based on collegiality, understanding and meeting student need.
- Staff are mutually supportive, motivated with a high commitment to meeting the needs of the student body.
- The school provides spacious and generally well equipped accommodation.
- Teachers and students have access to a range of technology.
- The school is well managed and operates smoothly on a day to day basis.
- Attendance has increased and is now above average for similar schools.
- The SIG bid included provision for an exit strategy to ensure sustainability without access to external funding.
- The principal is well aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the staff as a result of formal and informal classroom observation.
- There are small pockets of satisfactory and at times good teaching developing.
- Teachers benefit from the opportunity they have to plan together.
- Teachers operate a project based curriculum linked to state standards.
- Students enjoy the project based curriculum because it is different from their previous experiences and they see the relevance of their learning through applying the skills they have developed.
- Students with low literacy skills are benefitting from the introduction of Read 180.
- Teachers are generally inexperienced but have the desire to learn and further develop their pedagogical skills.
- Student attitudes to their learning are positive.
- The school gathers on-going assessment data, identifies student learning deficits and plans remediation programs.
- Scantron data is being developed to identify what each student knows, understands and can do.

- The school has developed a culture of trust and understanding between students and students and staff.
- Daily advisory sessions provide a valuable opportunity for reflection of academic and social issues.
- Students are beginning to develop their own goals and assume limited responsibility for their learning.
- Behavior throughout the school is satisfactory or better.
- Students are extremely positive about the support they receive from both staff and administrators.
- Students consider that the school advocates for them when they get into difficulty outside the school.
- Parents are generally positive about the school and how it supports the students.
- Parents welcome access to on line programs which provide useful performance and curriculum information.
- Parents receive personal quarterly communication relating to student performance.
- The school is beginning to develop positive relationships with a small number of partners.
- The 'food pantry' has been a success in addressing family poverty.

## The areas of the school that remain to be improved:

- The principal has yet to articulate his vision for the school effectively so it is understood and pursued by the school community.
- The school has not developed a strategic plan that provides direction and purpose.
- The current 'work plan' is an ineffective tool for long term school development and is currently out of date.
- The ability of the principal to lead the learning, pedagogy and overall philosophy of the school has been significantly constrained by the strictures of the DP model.
- The DP model limits the flexibility the school has to meet the diverse needs of the students it seeks to serve.
- The student entry profile used by the DP model to screen students is too demanding academically and disenfranchises a significant number of students who are refused admission.
- The mentors provided by AHSI and the Corporation have had little impact in supporting the principal on a regular and consistent basis with either administration issues or the development of leadership skills.
- The school has yet to deliver a financial reward structure for staff linked to student achievement.
- Administration and staff have yet to visit existing AHSI schools to observe good practice.
- The assistant principal has not been provided with a detailed job description.
- The mentor/master teaching program has yet to be implemented.
- There is no system in place to provide a rigorous evaluation system for teachers and principals.
- Partnerships with Universities to provide free or reduced cost graduate course opportunities have yet to be implemented.
- The planned 'intensive pre opening training' provided by DP was not attended by all staff and deficits not remedied, thus understanding of program implementation is variable.
- Insufficient progress has been made in implementing the school's designated educational program.
- Insufficient progress has been made in improving the quality of teaching and learning.
- Professional development designed to support the acquisition and understanding of DP strategies has not been of sufficient depth and frequency or closely aligned to staff and student need.
- On site professional development provided by DP has not been effectively evaluated.
- On site professional development provided by DP has not been well received by a significant percentage of teachers.
- Professional development is not 'narrowly tailored to specific practices and job imbedded' as required by the SIG.
- There is a tension between the demands of the DP program and the needs of staff and students.
- There is an insufficient link between classroom observations and professional development.
- Grading expectations of student work are variable between classes and too low overall.

- Professional development targeted at improving the understanding and use of data has been ineffective for the majority of teachers.
- Data is not used effectively to drive school decision making or inform the next steps in student learning.
- Weekly data surveys as indicated by the SIG do not always take place and are therefore not used to 'determine additional assistance or professional development'.
- Ongoing data collection has not been aligned to District and State data systems.
- There has been a significant student drop-out rate from the program (50 percent approximately).
- Neither the school nor the corporation has made satisfactory progress in ensuring the implementation of the full range of services and partnerships as outlined in the SIG.
- AHSI and SBCSC have yet to create three 'critical roles' identified in the SIG: viz. a High School and College Co-coordinator, a Learning through Internship Co-coordinator, or a Community Resource Developer.
- The number of electives provided by the program is limited and therefore does not satisfy the interest range of students.
- The school has yet to set up a 'monthly advisory group to discuss family and student issues.

## Part 3: Main Findings

**Overall Evaluation:** The school's overall performance and the extent to which the SIG funding has resulted in significant improvement:

### **This school has made unsatisfactory improvement.**

The school has made variable progress during the year to date. There are mitigating circumstances. The variance in pace of progress reflects the uncertain and rushed start the school experienced. The staff are lacking in experience but importantly not enthusiasm or commitment. Therefore they need effective and continuous support which has not always been forthcoming. The capacity of the staff to implement the DP program is questionable because of the inadequate professional development they have received. The program in its current form does not meet the needs of the entire student body. The decision to screen students using an academic indicator is resulting in the less able being disenfranchised.

The principal has managed the school well and it now runs smoothly on a day to day basis. However his ability to lead the learning and teaching is limited because of the strictures of DP. The principal is new to administration and therefore requires an effective mentor to support him through the early stages of his time in post. Those appointed have had little impact. Therefore his progress and that of the school has not been as rapid as required. He has not asserted himself sufficiently to ensure his vision is articulated. The principal has not developed a strategic plan to guide and inform progress.

Professional development has focused on program implementation. It has not been differentiated to meet teacher need. Staff members are becoming frustrated at the irregularity and lack of depth of these sessions and are quite critical of them. The principal has engaged in classroom observations which are beginning to have an impact on developing teaching skills. However, observations are not linked to personal development plans and therefore lack sufficient impact.

Training on the use of data has had minimal impact for most staff. It is not used effectively to inform planning either for the school or individual teachers. On-going assessments are used to identify deficits in understanding but not to plan the next steps in learning. The principal has not disaggregated the data to evaluate outcomes.

Contractual obligations of external partners and from the Corporation have not always been fulfilled. Where they are in place they make a valuable contribution to student development. Critical appointments of key positions have not occurred. Therefore aspects of student guidance are not in place and opportunities for participation in activities such as internships not realized.

The school has made significant progress in developing a positive culture. The principal has been instrumental in this development as a result of his high profile, interpersonal skills and empathy for the needs of both students and staff. Relationships are extremely good at all levels. Student behavior is satisfactory or better in the classroom and during transition. Students feel safe and report that they are able to talk to staff should they have a problem in the knowledge that help will be forthcoming. However, overall progress has been hampered because the support from both DP and the Corporation in critical areas has been inadequate.



## Commentary on SIG improvement areas:

### ***Leadership***

Rise Up Academy is ostensibly a new school having recruited new staff, a new administration, new students and been relocated in a new building. The rapidity in which all this was done created problems which detracted from the early progress of the school. The new principal was appointed one month before the school opened. The assistant principal did not take up her position until February 2011. New staff were appointed over an extended period and therefore were not all in place prior to the students arriving at the start of the semester. Staff and students report that the beginning of the school year was a volatile time as many required processes, practices and protocols were not in place. However the principal and staff have worked hard to remedy this and made good progress to ensure the school operates smoothly on a day to day basis.

Fourteen of the seventeen staff members are now on full time permanent contracts which has added stability and raised the level of commitment which was missing in the previous school. However, a significant number of teachers are new or relatively new to the profession and therefore understandably lack experience. Opportunities are available for the administration and staff to visit existing AHSI schools to promote good practice but these have not been taken up. Progress in understanding the DP model is therefore lessened. Similarly, partnerships with Universities to provide free or reduced cost graduate course opportunities have yet to be implemented. The assistant principal has not been provided with a detailed job description. Her role is therefore unclear.

The principal has no prior administrative experience. The mentors provided by AHSI and the Corporation have had little impact in supporting him on a regular and consistent basis with either administration issues or the development of leadership skills. Therefore his progress has been hampered both in terms of personal professional development and in understanding the most effective ways to get things done to move the school forward. This has led to slippage in meeting the explicit requirements of the SIG. Consequently, the school has yet to deliver a financial reward structure for staff linked to student achievement. The mentor/master teaching program has yet to be implemented. The absence of incentives both professional and financial, increase the difficulty for the school in attracting and retaining a high quality teaching force. The Corporation has yet to implement a system that provides a rigorous evaluation for teachers and principals. Therefore professional expectations are not explicit and outcomes not effectively monitored.

The turnaround partner for the school was selected prior to the principal being appointed. He therefore was not instrumental in making this selection. DP is very influential in the school, sitting on staff appointment committees, determining the style of teaching and providing the training for teachers to understand their model. This has significantly constrained the ability of the principal to lead the learning and pedagogy and develop his philosophy for the school because key aspects of his role are prescribed by the program. He has therefore become an educational manager rather than leader. The principal has yet to articulate his vision for the school. Neither has he developed a strategic plan to map out the direction for the school. The school is therefore reactive to events instead of planning for the future. Consequently there is no communal understanding of purpose, and progress has suffered as a result. The school has a work plan which is devised and monitored by the school and DP. It contains short objectives, lacks rigor, is out of date and is therefore of little use as a tool for long term school development.

The student population has diverse needs. Access to the DP program is reliant on students having the reading and mathematical capability of a grade 8 student. For many students this is not the case.

Therefore, the model limits the flexibility the school has to meet the needs of the students it seeks to serve. DP has developed a student entry profile containing academic indicators to screen students. For low achieving students this is too demanding academically and disenfranchises a significant number of them. The school is therefore carefully controlling its intake by refusing admission to special needs and other low attaining students.

The principal is highly visible around the school, well liked, and respected by both staff and students. They speak highly of him and the time that he gives them. Staff members appreciate the fact that he greets them on a daily basis and displays an interest in their well being. Student attendance has risen as a result of the increasingly prevalent positive culture. Staff members are part of decision making committees which has empowered them and raised their commitment to the school. This has resulted in a mutually supportive and highly motivated work force. The new building provides spacious and generally well equipped accommodation which promotes a positive learning environment and has a positive impact on student learning experiences. It also sends a message that they are valued. Students and staff have made good use of the new technology to effectively support teaching and learning. The SIG bid included provision for an exit strategy without access to external funding. This should ensure that progress made is sustainable over the longer period.

## **Recommendations**

- *A mentor with time and experience should be appointed to support the principal.*
- *The principal should make his vision for the school clear.*
- *The principal should develop a strategic plan.*
- *The principal should demonstrate his leadership by ensuring the program used by the school is modified to meet the needs of all students.*
- *The Corporation, in conjunction with the school should review the implications of the current student screening policy both for the school and overall educational provision.*

## **Instruction**

Insufficient progress has been made in implementing the school's designated educational program and improving the quality of teaching. The planned 'intensive pre opening training' provided by DP was not attended by all staff. Several teachers had not been appointed at the time of the training. The deficits have not been addressed thus understanding of the program implementation is variable. This has had a detrimental effect on the ability of the teachers to deliver a project based curriculum that engages students at an appropriate level. Far too many lessons observed lacked rigor and were not sufficiently challenging. Grading expectations of student work, intended to help them gain end of course credits, are far too low. There are small pockets of satisfactory and good teaching developing. In lessons that engage students there is evidence that teachers are using their subject knowledge to facilitate well-paced and focused lessons. Growth is noted in a few lessons where the instruction is helping students to make progress. There are examples of teachers creating PowerPoint presentations, using graphic organizers and relevant resources. This makes the subject matter being taught more accessible. In one English lesson, student learning was enhanced and progressed as the teacher guided a targeted group of students through their learning. The use of challenging questions elicited students'

understanding and addressed the State standards appropriately. Additionally, students in the focus group discussed the topic in detail, provided their own examples of their understanding and made good progress. The remaining students in the lesson worked independently on their projects and confidently researched information using computers. The administrators' lesson observations and feedback to teachers are beginning to show impact, helping teachers make progress in their instructional practices. However they are not linked to professional development opportunities and their impact is limited.

Teachers express their frustrations in the lack of program and instructional guidance provided by DP to support their skills as facilitators in student learning. Professional development designed to support the acquisition and understanding of DP strategies has not been of sufficient depth, frequency or closely aligned to staff and student need. Therefore progress made by teachers in acquiring the requisite skills is unsatisfactory in many cases. The training has not been well received by some staff. As one teacher stated, 'they give you a book and turn up occasionally!' Another echoed this view observing that 'they tried something and if it worked, good and if it didn't they wouldn't do it that way again'. The professional development that occurs is not 'narrowly tailored to specific practices and job imbedded' as required by the SIG. Therefore while teacher enthusiasm remains high their ability to improve is not being effectively supported. On site professional development provided by DP has not been effectively evaluated to determine teacher needs. Therefore there is a tension between the demands of the program and the specific needs of staff

Teachers report that they enjoy the opportunity they have to plan together and would welcome further opportunities to learn from each other and further develop their pedagogical skills. Teachers have made satisfactory progress in working collaboratively and in reflecting on their practice. They meet weekly in their departments, joined from time to time by the administrators to discuss student matters, develop the themes within the DP project-based model, and produce their lesson plans. Students enjoy the project based curriculum because it is different from their previous experiences. They see the relevance of their learning through applying the skills they have developed. This results in the majority of students having positive attitudes to their learning. The school has introduced Read 180 in an attempt to boost literacy skill acquisition so all students can access the curriculum being delivered. This is having a positive impact.

## **Recommendations**

- Develop individual professional development programs for all staff that derive from data analysis, lesson observations and teacher reflection.
- The principal should ensure that professional development linked to DP is evaluated and meets the needs of all staff so they fully understand the principles underpinning the program.
- The school should evaluate the impact of the DP program to ensure it is meeting both staff and student needs.
- The school should ensure all professional development is effective and becomes imbedded in classroom practice.
- Appoint a math coach, an English coach and an instructional coach to provide regular and accessible support and modeling for all staff.

## **Data**

The school has started to collect data both formally through Scantron and informally through on-going class based assessments. Insufficient use is made of this information at all levels throughout the school

for it to be an effective tool for school improvement. When used best, the ongoing assessment data collected are analyzed to identify student deficits. Programs are then uploaded and students can revisit their learning electronically. However there is a lack of understanding by administration and staff about which data they should collect, how best to manage its storage and retrieval and how to use its analysis to promote more effective student learning. Therefore progress in developing its use has been negligible. Professional development provided by DP on data usage has, with limited exceptions, had minimal impact on staff. Many do not fully understand its use or purpose. Information is not easily accessible for analysis. As a result, there has been unsatisfactory progress in teachers' use of data to inform their planning and build on prior student learning.

The administration does not use the information it has to inform school development decisions effectively. Data are not disaggregated to identify student academic performance by groups or ascertain student progress. Therefore the school has little evidence about the performance of groups and individuals that could be used to make timely interventions. Teachers are improving their assessment of student outcomes. Goals are set for individual students, but these are not consistently aligned to their next steps of learning.

There has not been adequate teacher training in the use of data. The provider has yet to deliver the contracted services designated in the SIG. Weekly data surveys as indicated by the SIG do not always take place. Therefore there is no formalized and cohesive system to measure the impact of decisions. Similarly there is little solid information being utilized to plan further development of the school. Ongoing data collection has not been aligned to IDOE or SBCSC data systems as required in the SIG.

## **Recommendations**

- *Appoint a data specialist to co-ordinate all data streams and provide salient information and instruction on its usage.*
- *Provide professional development for all staff on data collection and use so teachers understand its purpose and handle the information with confidence.*
- *Ensure teachers use data to plan the next steps in learning for individual students.*
- *Introduce a formalized procedure for the regular collection and evaluation of data streams.*
- *The administration should disaggregate and analyze data to inform developments in the strategic plan.*

## **Student Support**

The SIG clearly outlines the external resources and partnerships that should be in place to support the school's educational program and students directly. Neither the school nor the Corporation has made satisfactory progress in ensuring the implementation of the full range of services and partnerships that should be in place. The principal describes the current state of affairs as 'spotty and inadequate'. There has been limited support for students' job preparation from the Urban Youth Services, and the Martin Luther King Men's Group and Memorial Hospital have not fulfilled their service agreements. These are key services that would have supported African-American role modeling and provided student health services. The 'Bridges out of Poverty', a parents' academy and information service will begin operations from the Fall of 2011. The appointments of a High School and College Co-

coordinator, a Learning through Internship Co-coordinator, and a Community Resource Developer have not taken place. The SIG calls these 'critical roles' and would have enabled students to gain valuable experience in the community and at work through an internship program. The number of electives available to students is also limited and does not reflect their interests.

In contrast, there has been noted growth and positive impact from the Arc Angels services that provide training for student mentors. The students are very engaged and committed to the roles they undertake to support their peers. Currently there are 15 students trained with a continued program extending training and services over the next school year. Additionally, the Catalyst Lead training has taken place relating to promoting staff members' cultural proficiency. This research-based program has improved teachers' awareness to positively impact their relationships with students and their families. Other implemented services that have shown progress include the Robinson Learning Center that supports student and family understanding of career and college options. The work of this Center according to the principal has promoted students' aspirations for college exploration and applications.

The Paul Newman's Food Foundation provides sustenance for the students' families and a home refuge center. Students efficiently manage supplies and distribution as part of their community services. The probation and social services are dutiful in serving specific students to uphold their commitments. The counseling services have made a good start to setting up structures and processes for supporting students academically, monitoring their credit recovery and coursework/grade tracking. Students best served by these services are those who take it upon themselves to initiate actions for guidance. There is still room for improvement in formalizing processes to 'reach out' to those students who are least likely to seek help. There is a gap in the Scantron DP data system that does not track students' credit gains. Therefore the school and students are not always clear about the extent of and avenues required for ensuring credit accumulation. The counseling service has initiated links to the colleges, such as Ivy Tech College, which has provided senior students and their parents with financial aid information. The College's contract will be initiated in the fall of 2011.

The school has made extremely good progress in developing a positive culture based on trust and understanding. This is especially pertinent given the disruptive start to the year. Relationships are positive between staff, students and staff and students. As one student said, "I found myself supporting a teacher – I never thought that would happen." Another commented that, 'we are a bit like a family'. Behavior is satisfactory or better across the school and students feel safe. They also feel they can talk to staff if they are experiencing personal problems. Students state that the staff offers good support including acting as their advocate when they get in to trouble outside the school. Daily advisory sessions provide a valuable opportunity for reflection of academic and social issues. However, there is still a significant student drop-out rate of approximately 50 percent. Some of this is created by an over aggressive policy on absence which excludes students permanently after ten days. There is little outreach support to encourage students back to school.

Parents are generally positive about the support the school provides but would welcome increased communication. The school recognizes that the development of closer relations with parents and a robust outreach policy would have a positive impact on the community as a whole.

## **Recommendations**

- *The school and Corporation should ensure that all requirements of the SIG relating to involvement in external partnerships and appointments are enacted.*
- *The school should review its policy on absence and do everything possible to retain students in school.*